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PREACHING IN A WORLD AT WAR

I. THE TASK AND THE OPPORTUNITY

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No healthier, saner, and more helpful appeal could be made than President Davis makes to the preacher in these momentous days. In successive papers he will show how vital is the message that the Christian preacher can utter to a world in moral chaos. We have had many a noble exposition of patriotism from the pulpit; but the call to the church is for spiritual leadership even more than for patriotic inspiration. When one compares the exposition of the possibilities and materials for such leadership set forth in these papers with the vagaries and obscurantism, not to say debilitating pacifism, of current "studies of prophecy," the source of a genuine evangelicalism will not be difficult to discover. Our generation needs the bread of life. It will starve on ingenious substitutes.

Every Christian preacher is facing the most exigent and commanding situation of human history in these days of war. Never was there such need of the clear mind and the flaming soul in the pulpits of America. Today as never before the preacher may come to his throne.

But in what spirit is he to preach? What is his distinctive message? How is he to prepare for and discharge the task? These questions surge to the center of our thought. The following articles have been written in view of the situation and with the simple desire to render practical service to ministers engaged in the work of preaching. They rest upon a somewhat extensive acquaintance with the war literature and a rereading of the Bible to discover its message and suggest plans for its transmission through the pulpit to a bewildered and needy world.

New Conditions Presented by the War

The act of preaching is a complex and difficult matter under the easiest conditions. Many forces enter into it; the factors composing it are often difficult to untangle.

There is the truth to be proclaimed. If this were simply to be elaborated out of a perfectly clear and infallible statement, preaching would not be a very perplexing task, as it surely would not be a rewarding or stimulating one. But the truth that the preacher is to proclaim, in all the depth and range of it, can be discovered only at the cost of intense search and patient thinking.

Then there is the personality of the preacher, the medium through which the truth is transmitted in oral form. This is as varied, even under the most favorable circumstances, as personality itself is varied. Real preparation for preaching is nothing less than the preparation

of the whole man. The final means by which the truth gets itself expressed is the refined and kindled soul of the man in the pulpit.

Then there is the congregation, that limiting audience whose every mood conditions the extent to which the truth, granted that it has been accurately transmitted through the personality of the preacher, influences the life of those who hear the message. Jesus understood this principle when he used the familiar parable of the Sower, or, as it would be better called, the parable of the Soils, to enforce the command, "Take heed how ye hear." For the truth must do business with the persons who hear the sermon; but what it can do will be determined by the receptive audience.

Then there is the world in which the preacher and the congregation live. This conditions, not only the task of the preacher, but also the mood of the hearer. Out of the age come the forces that condition the truths and the discerning powers and the responsive wills, all of which compose the factors in the work of preaching.

Therefore it is obvious that all effective preaching must reckon carefully with the age in which the preacher gives his message to his congregation. This is not the supreme item, but it is one of the most significant factors determining the power and permanence of the preacher's work. Spiritual discernment and deep conviction are more significant; but in order that preaching may be sure-footed it must rest on clear insight into the meaning of the age. Otherwise it will become merely an academic interest and will not stir

deeply the springs of character and conduct.

At the time these words are written the world is at war, and there is no sign by which the wisest man can discover the length or the final issue of the conflict. And whether the term of the struggle be long or short, it is apparent that tasks of reconstruction are in store which will make the next decade at least one of the most fascinating and difficult periods for preaching in all human history. The problems which are to be solved are so vast and involved, the principles to be applied are so radical and comprehensive, that nothing less than the most serious engagement of the preacher with them will insure the success of the message and the triumph of the truth.

That the character of preaching will be permanently changed by the Great War requires little discussion if we accept the definitions of preaching that are current in the free pulpits. The fact is put with passionate earnestness in the letters of the young French student-soldier, Alfred Eugene Casalis:

First, there will be our preaching to change. All that consists in empty formulas, beautiful as they may be, powerfully as they may have contributed to nourish souls; all the formulas which are today empty because our philosophic or religious thought, our experiences or our conception of life have outgrown them or caused them to burst their frames—all such formulas must disappear. And what we shall substitute for them as our statement of faith will not be less great, not less beautiful, not less true, if we search for it in the depths of souls in union with God. And it will not be less Christian, for the Spirit of Christ is a

spirit which lives, which develops—never remaining for a moment in any fixed form.¹

The significant words in this statement are "souls in union with God." That, after all, was the purpose which called all the formulas into being; and we need have no fear of loss if the creative energies behind the formulas are saved. The creeds have served their purpose well in the history of the spirit; they will always be needed. But it is the vital force that creates the creed; it is the experience that renews the formal expression of faith; and out of the Great War is surely coming the old experience of souls in union with God, which is the eternal fact in religion.

Therefore we need not fear changes either in the substance or in the form of preaching so long as its essential message is preserved. And all who understand the meaning of the war as it is being interpreted to us by the religious leaders who are in the midst of it are ready to meet the changes without dread and with a clear idea of what must be done in the process of readjustment.

The fear has been expressed that preaching in such an age will lack opportunity. The very fact that the minds of men are so engrossed with the tasks of military campaigns has been supposed to make well-nigh impossible the declaration of great spiritual truths.

But quite the contrary is the fact. It is in the midst of a generation solemnized by the tremendous experiences of such a conflict that the profoundest truths have the field which they require for expres-

sion. In an age that is smitten with poignant grief and stirred to expressions of terrible wrath preaching finds its supreme opportunity.

This has been put concisely by A. Conan Doyle in the following words: "It is, however, when the human soul is ploughed and harrowed by suffering that the seeds of truth may be planted, and so some future spiritual harvest will surely rise from the days in which we live."²

Thus instead of limiting the true function of the preacher this war is simply opening the doors of opportunity to him and affording such privilege as he never has had before to bring the Christian message home to the hearts of men.

The question is often asked, Will there be such changes in the form and subjects of preaching as a result of the war that we can no longer expect results from the methods that have been successful before? The changes which we anticipate are not radical. The Christian message always has been spoken home to the heart of humanity with the tender and persuasive accents of love and testimony. This will not be changed when the war is over, as it is not changed now when the war is on. Donald Hankey, writing concerning his own methods of presenting the message of Christ, said:

When I was talking to them [the soldiers] at these services I always used to try and make them feel that Christ was the fulfillment of all the best things that they admired, that he was their natural hero. I would tell them some stories of heroism and

¹ *For France and the Faith*, p. 79.

² "The New Revelation," *Metropolitan Magazine*, January, 1918.

meanness contrasted, of courage and cowardice, of noble forgiveness and vile cruelty, and so get them on the side of the angels. Then I would try and spring it upon them that Christ was the Lord of the heroes and the brave men and the noble men, and that he was fighting against all that was mean and cruel and cowardly, and that it was up to them to take their stand by his side if they wanted to make the world a little better instead of a little worse, and I would try to show them how in little practical ways in their homes and at their work and in the club they could do their bit for Christ.¹

All this sounds strangely unlike the formal rules for preaching which have been systematized in the science of homiletics. But the permanent principles of preaching are all here. There is the old consciousness of the message to be given, the adapting of the message to the mind of the hearer and the world in which it is to be wrought out into rules for life, and the appeal for such decisions as will make the truth vital. Thus the new opportunities presented by the war have simply given larger liberty for the expression in oral form of the message which we call "the gospel."

Is Preaching Played Out?

When the war began, the criticism of preaching had been for a long time current. It was commonly said that the pulpit had lost its power and that preaching was played out. It may as well be admitted frankly that there was some fair warrant for the adverse judgment.

In the first place, the increase in the complex duties of the minister has tended steadily to crowd preaching out of its place of primary importance. The demand for efficient administration and

for all sorts of social service had made it well-nigh impossible for a minister to find the time for study and sermon preparation that the relatively simple demands of a former generation permitted. So men have allowed their time and strength to be consumed in the doing of all sorts of administrative work to the neglect of their preaching.

Again, it is fair to state that there has been a decided loss of the sense of *message* from modern preaching. The argument and the essay and the descriptive presentation of social situations have intruded upon the message which was originally given with the fire of deep conviction straight from the preacher's flaming soul. Our preachers have not been great and positive in heralding the truth to the very heart of the generation. The old flame of the prophets and the missionaries has burned low. The torch of the teacher and educator has taken its place with imperfect success.

This is not to disparage the work of religious education and the task of the teacher-preacher. But it is to assert that nothing ever has taken the place of the ardent message which is good news still. There has been much sorrow expressed because the church has seemed to lose its worshippers. But there is something far worse than to lose the crowd; it is loss beyond remedy when the church loses its message. "Message" is a word often misused; but it is one of the great words nevertheless. The preacher is the messenger and his sermon is a message. Nothing less than this will answer for preaching in this generation.

¹ *A Student in Arms*, Series 1, p. 156.

But the criticism against the preachers has been too severe. Neither the churches nor their leaders have failed to the extent that is claimed by the critics. We see this in the way in which the hearts of the people turn again to the institutions and the message of the Christian religion when the days are dark. So we face the future full of courage. The preacher will yet come into his own, and preaching is not played out; it is just entering upon a new expression of power.

It is not too much to say that the way in which the churches and ministers have behaved has earned for them a better judgment and a kinder consideration. The former criticism is put by Donald Hankey as follows:

The clergy are out of touch with the laity. They do not as a rule understand the real difficulties and temptations of the ordinary man. The sin against which they preach is sin as defined in the theological college, a sort of pale lifeless shadow of the real thing. The virtue which they extol is equally a ghost of the real, generous, vital love of good which is the only thing that is of any use in the everyday working life of the actual man.¹

But the ministers have entered the service of the country and have taken up the work of safeguarding the moral life of the soldiers in such sacrificial ways as prove that their ideals at least are right, even if they have not understood as fully as they might the conditions under which the average man lives and works. And in the camps and trenches the chaplains have shown that they are made of the right stuff. They have shared the hardships and dangers of the

men; they have been with them in the supreme moments of life; they have vindicated the old ideals of the ministry which were supposed to have been lost or to have fallen on evil days.

The influence of this practical experience must produce a new type of minister. Not only those who have gone into service away from their churches, but those who have remained at home are alike stimulated by the way in which religion has been connected up with real life in the war. Practical experience of this sort led Hankey to write:

Indications are not wanting that the present crisis may evolve teachers of a new kind in the ranks of the clergy and the professors. Many clergy have enlisted in noncombatant corps, and must there have gained a much deeper sense of the needs of ordinary men than they ever acquired in the University, the clergy school, and the parish. Some of the younger dons have also plunged into life, and they may be expected to produce literature of a new type when they return to their studies.²

Every preacher ought to be thinking carefully about the influence that the war is going to have on his life and his message. Time after time he ought to reflect carefully on the spiritual significance of the mighty conflict as it transforms his own point of view and his use of his talents. This will be a part of the devotional culture of the minister in these times of war and reconstruction. Is the message becoming more vital and real? Is the urgency of preaching increasing? Is there a sense of the power of religion in our words **that was not there before the war began?** With such questions as these it will be possible to

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

² *Ibid.*, p. 183.

make the spiritual significance of the war a part of the increased equipment of the preacher.

Let us now consider how the modern preacher, thus enlarged in his ideals concerning his own task, is to serve the community in ways which were not apparent before the war began.

The Larger Work of the Preacher Today

Thousands of ministers have been obliged to decide that they would remain at home, carry on the work of the pulpit and parish, and render service necessary to the highest welfare of the nation in the familiar place and through the accepted methods of church work. In countless cases it would have been easier to have gone into camp and trench. The call of romance is there; the spirit of adventure lures every manly soul to the great conflict across the sea. There are no bugles blowing for those who "keep the home fires burning," and for a generation the man who won a cross of some kind somewhere will have the right of eminent appeal to the popular mind.

This is altogether a minor consideration to the man who has settled the question of the place and character of the service that he will render in this age of war. And yet it is not without significance and must be reckoned with in the factors that determine how we shall preach. The important matter for all ministers is that, whether they go abroad or stay at home, they all shall interpret their work in larger terms and derive from the world-situation new energy and courage for an enlarged service. All who stay by the stuff must

get some adequate discipline out of the experience that shall be commensurate with that which is coming to the chaplains and the men in service overseas. *The peril of the minister in America just now is that he will catch no new vision of what it really means to be a preacher and pastor.* The conditions under which the chaplains and other Christian workers overseas or in the camps at home labor are evolving new standards for preaching which will in time seep into the practice of the remotest country pulpit. The men who are meeting this situation know the keen joy of actually taking part in the reconstruction of the methods of preaching.

But in the home parish the external conditions remain much as they were before the war began. Many young men are missing; there are new industrial problems to be faced; but the old church, the old services, the familiar families are all there, and the war is still very far away. This tends to cause the home-staying minister to settle back into the familiar ways, preach about as he used to, make his calls in the easy round, and live in the old routine.

And this means plain suicide in the modern church. Since 1914 the world has changed. We still dress about as we used to and continue to growl about life's little irritations. A man in the lounging-room of his club will still display such lack of perspective and proportion as permits him to interrupt the reading of the casualty list with a peeved complaint at the quality of the bread served him at lunch. But still we do not think as we did four years ago and we never shall again. Our scales of values

has been entirely upset. Conventional standards are broken up. And yet in the midst of all this it is perfectly possible for a minister to perform the established functions, go through the old motions, and "last" for some time in the midst of a patient parish not yet fully awake itself. The momentum of venerable methods picks up such a satisfied minister and bears him onward like a mummy on the Nile at flood. It is a fearful fact. A minister in the United States today may be so busy doing fussy jobs and may so persuade himself that he is useful and necessary to the community that he may become blind as a mole to what is going on in the world around him. He sometimes knows the period of the Nicene Council better than he knows what has happened in Russia since the war began.

Ministers must wake up and get superbly alive now, or they are lost. They must read and reason and decide critical questions. There is something bigger than chickens and parish favors lurking around the parsonages of the land. Ministers must feel the movements of the age and evaluate the changes that are taking place in the world around them. This is the common obligation that rests upon them, whether they go into distinct national and Christian service abroad or decide that they can make an equally important contribution to the highest welfare of the nation while remaining at home.

How can this be done? The continued responsibilities of the parish must be met with service that involves all the resources at the command of the minister. Sermons, visits, weddings, funerals, occasional addresses, com-

munity tasks—these have not been remitted by the war. They must be attended to, for they constitute the old task. We have no more time at our command; there is only the strength of the average man to be used in the work. But there are better tools at hand, and the time and strength at our disposal may be more economically used. The preacher in war time must dispose of his energies in a better way. Time must be made for reading, for serious thinking, for painstaking sermon preparation. These are dangerous days for the man who is fluent in speech and can easily get away with a public address. Almost anyone can consume the time set apart for the sermon in the order of public worship, too few men can really preach a clarifying, moving, and convincing sermon that shall set confused minds straight and bring them to great decisions. But this is the kind of preaching that we must have if the Christian church is to serve the present generation in the place of its supreme need. When a layman is forced to say, "I couldn't make head nor tail out of it," in nine cases out of ten the difficulty is not with the head of the layman, but with the heads of the discourse. The sermon had neither head nor tail nor body, and—what is worse—it had no neck. The preachers of tomorrow must work as they never worked before. They cannot run errands or attend functions so extensively if they are to be God's prophets to a perplexed world.

The preacher never has been given a greater privilege than this. It ought to call out the unused energies of mind and spirit to a nobler service than ever has been rendered by the pulpit. It is

the same call that the nation has sent forth to its young men to defend its liberties, and it ought to be answered in the spirit with which the soldiers have sailed for France.

Owen Seaman has expressed the truth in the last stanzas of his "Pro Patria":

And we, whose burden is to watch and wait—

High-hearted ever, strong in faith and prayer—

We ask what offering we may consecrate,
What humble service share.

To steel our soul against the lust of ease;
To bear in silence, though our hearts may bleed

To spend ourselves, and never count the cost,

For others' greater need;

To go our quiet ways, subdued and sane;
To hush all vulgar clamor of the street;
With level calm to face alike the strain
Of triumph or defeat;

This be our part, for so we serve you best,
So best confirm their prowess and their pride,

Your warrior sons, to whom in this high test
Our fortunes we confide.

The Creator of Public Opinion

The service of the preacher as a creator of public opinion cannot be overestimated in the modern age. In the churches in our communities gather the people who are representative of the highest ideals and the noblest living. The preacher has Sunday after Sunday the privilege of speaking to them on the supreme subjects that can engage the mind and stir the emotions. It may

seem at first glance as if he had scant opportunity to do any creative work in the precious "thirty minutes to raise the dead"; but the value of these times of quickening, if they are rightly used, is great beyond our present realization.

And it is not the great churches in the cities alone where this influence is felt most significantly. This has been put by Arthur Gleason in one of the timely books of the war:

What one cares very much to reach is the solid, silent public opinion of the smaller cities, the towns, and villages. The local storekeeper, the village doctor, the farmer, these are the men who make the real America—the America which responds slowly but irresistibly to a sound presentation of facts. The alert newspaper editor, the hustling real-estate man, the booster for a better-planned town, these citizens shape our public opinion. If once our loyal Middle Westerners know the wrong that has been done people just like ourselves, they will resent it as each of us resents it that has seen it.¹

Now that which Mr. Gleason discerns here so accurately applies to the work of the preacher. It is in the little towns and among the scattered communities that the influences must be set in motion that are finally to carry the nation as a whole forward or backward in its policy and program. What New York City thinks is important; but what the villages of the whole country think is the final fact that determines the policy of the nation. And what the small community thinks is determined in no slight degree by what the pulpit in that community stands for week by week.

¹ *Our Part in the Great War*, p. 275.

If ever there was a call for ministers who are enlightened on matters of international moment it is now. If there is a preacher anywhere who is contented in these earnest days to go on saying over the same old words, going through the same old motions, it would seem as if he had embalmed his own mind and soul in anticipation of an inevitable resignation which the community in due time would reckon as no loss. Here is our civilization faced with the most searching questions and exigent problems of history; here is the church, even in the smallest community, charged with the sacred and solemn responsibility of creating the ideals that will guide the nation into the great day of reconstruction; and now and again we meet a minister who seeks to interpret his task as that of watching the rival denomination on the other corner and saying over like a wearisome parrot the old phrases that the fathers wore out and that the present generation cares nothing about. The very spirit of the times calls for a renewal of intellectual energy and determined utterance that will help create in the minds of the people the ideals which will bear the country through its time of suffering and renewal. It takes hard work to measure up to this trust; no minister who is inclined to indolence or arrogance can last long now. To help create public opinion today is the greatest privilege that ever has come to the preacher.

The Messenger of Courage

Again, the modern preacher must be a man who can give courage and steadfastness to the people. This was one of the chief sources of strength to the

prophets. The words of Isa. 40:1 are intensely binding today, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." For the world is weary and sad. The cost of this carnage has grown beyond all the power of man to estimate, and the weight of the burden that rests on the souls of the parish is heavier than ever before in the history of the world.

There is only one man in the community who is commissioned and prepared to speak the words of comfort and hope that the people crave. He is the preacher. His task has been defined in the work of the prophets and set forth in the mission of Jesus. When the prophets comforted Israel they set the modern preacher an example; when Jesus brought hope and strength to human hearts he defined the message of his modern representatives, the preachers of the good news of comfort.

But this does not mean that the preacher does not face the tragic meaning of the war and understand just how terrible is the misery that it has brought. The word of hope today must be spoken out of full knowledge of the grief that has swept over the world. There is a sort of blind optimism that dwells in a fool's paradise and cries "peace, peace" when there is no peace. The modern preacher does not live there, and his message is not an irrational assurance couched in idle words. We must win the message from the severest wrestling with the world-situation at its worst, and must face all the facts before seeking to comfort the people.

Of course this means that we have won firm faith in the righteousness of our cause, and believe that in the end that which is just and good cannot be

defeated. These are times when the old lines of Browning take on new significance. He dared describe himself as one who

Never turned his back, but marched breast forward;
Never doubted clouds would break; never dreamed though right were worsted wrong would triumph;
Held, we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake.

The literature produced by the war is full of references to these sources of courage in the rightness of the cause. Richardson Wright puts it in this way: "The invulnerable armor you must wear in these days is an unfailing belief in the righteousness of our cause."¹

The Bishop of London in a sermon says: "The positive comfort is this—God has never allowed deviltry, lust, and tyranny finally to triumph in His world."²

Now if this is more than a mere theory it must afford real comfort to the hearts of men in these days. It may take time to insure the triumph of the just cause; but in the end it is certain. If this is so we can afford to wait and to trust, even through darker days of reconstruction than those that marked the war itself. The modern preacher in America can well afford to link with some of the great comforting tests of the Old Testament the words of the hymn that has been sung by our people through the dark days of warfare:

Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just.

It is a glorious mission to be such a messenger of courage to one's generation. The poets have been singing in a way to put heart into the men and women who struggle and suffer. Dyneley Hussey has expressed this message of courage in one of the war sonnets as follows:

Alone amid the battle-din untouched
Stands out one figure beautiful, serene;
No grime of smoke nor reeking blood hath smutched

The virgin brow of this unconquered queen.

She is the Joy of Courage vanquishing
The unstilled tremors of the fearful heart;

And it is she that bids the poet sing
And gives to each the strength to bear his part.

Her eye shall not be dimmed, but as a flame
Shall light the distant ages with its fire,
That men may know the glory of her name,
That purified our souls of fear's desire.

And she doth calm our sorrow, soothe our pain,

And she shall lead us back to peace again.³

What Does it All Mean?

It is apparent immediately that no preacher can speak with satisfaction in these days unless he has thought through the meaning of the Great War and is in his own mind clear about the part that his country is taking in the struggle.

This is a severe test. Hundreds of ministers have been faithful workers in the cause of peace. They have been members of the various organizations that have been at work in the interests

¹ *Letters to the Mother of a Soldier*, p. 12.

² *Christ and the World at War*, p. 134.

³ *A Treasury of War Poetry*, p. 179.

of international unity and good-will. They have preached sermons on the subject of universal peace and have interpreted the teachings of Jesus as bearing positively upon the program for peace.

Then came the war. At first it seemed as if we could carry out the part of a neutral in the great struggle. The terrible character of the struggle, as it developed a type of savagery unknown before in the history of fratricidal warfare, intensified the instinctive horror against war on the part of preachers. Probably the attitude of thousands is represented by that of Dr. Charles E. Jefferson, of New York. He had been one of the most efficient and forceful champions of the peace cause in America. He summed up his impressions with his characteristic clarity of style in the volume entitled *What the War Is Teaching*, published in 1916. But when the declaration of war came Dr. Jefferson accepted the situation and met the new conditions loyally.

There have been a few ministers who have been unable to follow in this path. They are committed to a radical pacifist position and find it impossible to justify the war in any way. Such men have a most difficult position to fill in the present situation. Probably the ground on which they stand may be understood by reading either or both of two books: *New Wars for Old* (1916), by John Haynes Holmes; and *The Outlook for Religion* (1918), by W. E. Orchard. Dr. Holmes makes a clear statement of radical pacifism. Dr. Orchard writes with trenchant force.

But after the declaration of war, based as it was upon the record of patience and restraint on the part of

the United States, it is difficult to see how a preacher can possibly take the position maintained by the non-resistant pacifist. Granted all possible freedom for the sake of conscience, there are certain responsibilities for the guidance of the people that would seem practically to demand that a preacher shall support the nation in its struggle or for the time retire from the pulpit. However, that question concerns the individual minister and those to whom he is responsible. No law can be laid down that will apply to all cases. Certainly the objector to military action as a means of settling such a question as the one now being fought out in Europe has a hard time.

Let us turn now to certain books that will be of assistance in the present struggle to the preacher, who must justify to his own mind and conscience the war program of the nation. There are scores of men who have passed through the experience of settling the question, and to their work we may turn with confidence.

To anyone who is inclined to question whether or not we might have remained neutral longer than we did or even permanently, it is a pleasure to commend the second section of Arthur Gleason's *Our Part in the Great War*. In six short chapters under the caption "Why Some Americans Are Neutral" Mr. Gleason shows how a time comes in every great moral question when neutrality is no longer possible if one is to keep his integrity and self-respect. The world is united too closely to allow any part of it to suffer great wrongs without involving all the rest. So the time comes when active participation in a great struggle is a responsibility placed by

God himself upon an individual and a nation. Under those conditions

'Tis man's perdition to be safe
When for the truth he ought to die.

So Mr. Gleason accepts the war "as a revelation of the human spirit in one of its supreme struggles between right and wrong." And in the presence of such a struggle it is impossible for a Christian to be neutral. There is only one side to the question, and only one side on which a true man can stand. It is impossible to read the report that Mr. Gleason makes of his personal observations in France without feeling that the utmost exertion of force is necessary to curb the plundering lust of the nation that has run amuck in the midst of modern civilization. The Great War is the tremendous assertion of the moral idealism of the world against the greatest enemy of human welfare that ever has arisen in the course of history.

But there is another leader of American thought who has written a little book which for power to set the issue forth in convincing fashion is unsurpassed. In *The Challenge of the Present Crisis* by Harry Emerson Fosdick the perplexed preacher will find help as nowhere else in the writer's knowledge. The discussion is not long; but just as Dr. Fosdick never touches anything that he does not illuminate, here he has done one of the most useful and necessary bits of service that he had yet performed in his most useful life.

Dr. Fosdick writes out of his heart in the whole matter. He has felt precisely as nearly all the ministers in the country felt from the outbreak of the

conflict. He has not changed his mind at all; war is still to him a folly and a horror. Perhaps his spirit in the discussion is best revealed in the remarkable prayer with which he pleads the cause of America:

O God, bless our Country! We lament before Thee the cruel necessity of war. But what could we do? Our dead by hundreds lie beneath the sea; the liberties that our sires baptized with their blood and handed down to us in trust, so that they are not ours alone but all humanity's, are torn in shreds; and a foe is loose against us whom we have not chosen, whom we have not aggrieved, and who in his will to conquer counts solemn oaths to be but scraps of paper and the chivalry of the seas an empty name. We have grown weary, to the sickness of our souls, sitting comfortable here, while others pour their blood like water forth for those things which alone can make this earth a decent place for men to live upon. What could we do? With all the evils of our nation's life, that we acknowledge and confess with shame, we yet plead before Thee that we have not wanted war, that we hate no man, that we covet no nation's possessions, that we have nothing for ourselves to gain from war, unless it be a clear conscience and a better earth for all the nations to live and grow in. We plead before Thee that if patience and good-will could have won the day, we gladly should have chosen them, and patience long since would have had her perfect work. And now we lay our hand upon our sword. Since we must draw it, O God, help us to play the man and to do our part in teaching ruthlessness once for all what it means to wake the sleeping lion of humanity's conscience.¹

One knows after reading this that the discussion is not an essay, but rather

¹ *The Challenge of the Present Crisis*, p. 46.

the report of "the struggle of the writer to see his way and keep his soul alive in this terrific generation." Dr. Fosdick understands the grim meaning of that struggle through which many a minister has been passing as he has wrestled with the problem thrown upon him by the war and has tried to decide just what and how he could preach to his people. As he says, "One of the most important battles of this generation is being fought behind closed doors, where men are making up their minds whether this war is to leave them social pessimists or not."¹

The world gives little recognition to the reality and significance of the mental struggle through which the ministers have passed since the Great War began; but we have seen it in its intensity and know how searching it has been. Not only the ministers in conspicuous positions have passed through the struggle, but the men in the smaller parishes as well have faced the problem with as great seriousness.

And certainly the experience has sufficed to set forth some values in a clearer light. Ideas and institutions that occupied the foreground in current thinking have retreated strangely into the dim regions of consciousness. It was put in quaint form by one of the early books on the war. The references are to English life, but they are equally applicable to American conditions. The following is a piece of the dialogue:

"I don't know," said Wagstaffe thoughtfully. "War is hell, and all that, but it has a good deal to recommend it. It wipes out all the small nuisances of peace-time."

"Such as —?"

"Well, Suffragettes, and Futurism, and ——— and ———."

"Bernard Shaw," suggested another voice. "Hall Caine —."

"Yes, and the Tango, and party politics, and golf-maniacs. Life and Death, and the things that really are big, get viewed in their proper perspective for once in a way."²

Surely it is a welcome relief to be freed from the tyranny of some of the nuisances in current thinking. At least the big issues are in the front now, and the preacher can be sure that he speaks to a new temper. We do not quite know just what it all means. The time of definition has not come yet. We can feel it, however, and it acts quite outside our conscious recognition to give a certain depth and reality to preaching that it did not possess before the fact of war laid us under its solemnity and bade us put off all fooling.

At this point it will be worth while to look at the way in which men of earnest spirit and profound seriousness have looked at the war. There is no clearer vision on the part of any man than that possessed by Rev. Robert F. Horton, of England, and this is what he says:

It is one of the greatest moments in the life of the world that we are living through now; one of the greatest steps in the progress of humanity is about to be taken; in human evolution nothing has happened before like this; it is the great step by which nations raise themselves into the moral life and learn to behave to one another on a moral principle and in accordance with the eternal laws of God.³

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

² Ian Hay, *The First Hundred Thousand*, p. 120.

³ *Christ and the World at War*, p. 81.

Donald Hankey put the motives of the soldier, which must also be the motives of the citizens who are to carry on the work of the soldiers, as follows:

If we fought from blood-lust or hate, war would be sordid. But if we fight as only a Christian may, that friendship and peace with our foes may become possible, then fighting is our duty, and our fasting and dirt, our wounds and our death, are our beauty and God's glory.¹

Now if the preacher can win his own standing-ground in the midst of the current confusion in some such noble way as this he will have the right spirit in which to give his message to his community. And the temper in which he addresses himself to his work is the primary concern in these days. Unless he is thinking clearly and unless his own heart is right he will have no message and the community will look to him in vain for leadership.

THE PREMILLENNIAL MENACE

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To divide Christians by appeal to theological differences in these days savors of disloyalty. We need unity of religious spirit if our national morale is to be strong and hopeful. But the present crusade of premillenarians is not a matter of mere theology. It strikes at the heart of our religion if not of our patriotism. For this reason we discuss it. An assault upon our faith in a God who works through human ideals and national sacrifice for the sake of a better world is too dangerous to be permitted without protest and exposure. Professor Case writes with the facts before him, without bitterness but with warning. Since his paper has been put in type the newspapers report that several of the leaders of one of these movements have been found guilty of disloyal utterances and sentenced to imprisonment.

The American nation is engaged in a gigantic effort to make the world safe for democracy. While pledged to give unreservedly of its blood and treasure for the attainment of this ideal, there are those in our midst who declare that the undertaking is foredoomed to failure. The writer has before him a recent letter

containing these oracular words: "If it were not pathetic it would be silly to think that democracy, if it prevails, will cause wars to cease. The men who believe this are simply chasing a phantom that will always elude them. There is no solution except the coming of Christ as he foretold."

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 241.